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An Anthropological Examination of the Political Discourse on Same-Sex Marriage

by

Jeremy Jay Greenup

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

Marriage has come to be center-stage in a semiotic and ideological "culture war." The issue of same-sex marriage has emerged as a defining political argument shaping the manner by which the contemporary gay rights movement positions itself. In Georgia's 2004 election, a constitutional amendment was proposed defining marriage as legal unions between only biological men and women. In response, campaigns were organized by both supporters and opponents to same-sex marriage. This thesis examines the politics of spectacle at play through which both sides of this argument positioned themselves.

This thesis employs anthropological theory, queer theory and public sphere literature to illuminate the campaign against same-sex marriage as one of not only the denial of citizenship rights, but of identity recognition. The methods of theatricality employed by both sides of this debate are examined alongside the manners by which they represented themselves as legitimate voices in the fight over "marriage."

INDEX WORDS: same-sex marriage, heteronormativity, queer theory, theatricality, political protests

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2005

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By

Jeremy Jay Greenup

Main Professor:	Emanuela Guano
Committee:	Kathryn A. Kozaitis
	Susan McCombie
	Cassandra White

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
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Chapter I

Introduction

The Announcement

On March 31, 2004, the Georgia State Legislature passed Senate Resolution 595. SR 595, as it is known in legislative circles, states that legal marriages in the State of Georgia are to be limited to those unions between biological men and biological women. SR 595 prohibits same-sex partnerships from being legally recognized unions, with the various benefits entitled those unions. SR 595 also sought to add to Article I of the Georgia State Constitution an additional Section IV which reads:

> Section IV. Marriage.
> Paragraph I. Recognition of marriage.
> (a) This state shall recognize as marriage only the union of man and woman. Marriages between persons of the same sex are prohibited in this state.
> (b) No union between persons of the same sex shall be recognized by this state as entitled to the benefits of marriage. This state shall not give effect to any public act, record, or judicial proceeding of any other state or jurisdiction respecting a relationship between persons of the same sex that is treated as a marriage under the laws of such other state or jurisdiction. The courts of this state shall have no jurisdiction to grant a divorce or separate maintenance with respect to any such relationship or otherwise to consider or rule on any of the parties' respective rights arising as a result of or in connection with such relationship.

When SR 595 passed the state legislature, it also placed this proposed state constitutional amendment on the November 2004 election ballot as a referendum, to be voted on by the citizens of the State of Georgia. Legislators and lobbyists alike fought a rather intense battle over this issue while public attention and debate escalated.

The Invitation

The issue of same-sex marriage has been defined as a political, economic, moral and religious issue. The issue is one of national scale in the United States, particularly in light of events early in 2004 in San Francisco, where courts issued 3,428 marriage licenses to same-sex couples before being ordered to stop. Along with the societal recognition of marriage, heterosexual couples are granted legal recognition of their marriage contracts, which brings with it 1,138 federal laws applied to Americans who are married. These laws range from the inclusion of spouses on health care plans, Social Security benefits, childcare and adoption rights, tax benefits, as well as various property and inheritance rights.

President Bush stated in response to the issuing of licenses in California:

> After more than two centuries of American jurisprudence and millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization (Lacayo 2004).

Additionally, Bush has announced his support for the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would add a federal Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages throughout the United States and, thereby, clearly defining legal marriage as that union between a biological man and a biological woman serving as husband and wife. The amendment would, in part, read:

> In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife (Baird 1997:19).

The issue is a prevalent one and, in the November 2004 election, one which was voted on in eleven of our fifty United States, Georgia included. The Defense of Marriage

Act, signed by President Clinton and passed into law by Congress in 1996, made same-sex marriage illegal under United States Federal Law. Essentially, same-sex marriage has been formally illegal since 1996. Why, then, did this issue come to be in the spotlight eight years later?

In February 2004, the Mayor of the City of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, began allowing for the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Since that time, the states of both California and Massachusetts saw cases of same-sex marriage licenses being issued and upheld by courts while public debate surrounding these marriages escalated. As a result of these occurrences, President Bush publicly denounced these "activist judges" and called for a Constitutional amendment to "protect" marriage. This manifested itself in that eleven states saw proposed state constitutional amendments on their ballots during this election year and, according to the November 11, 2004, issue of the Atlanta based weekly newspaper, *Southern Voice*, at least six more states are expected to have similar amendments on their ballots in state referendums within the next year.

The purpose of this thesis is to address the fundamental and core question of this debate: Why do gays and lesbians seek legal marriage and why do some people oppose same-sex marriage?

Additional questions raised in this debate and publicly addressed by both sides of the argument included; Are same-sex couples entitled to the same rights and entitlements granted their heterosexual counterparts? Is the "sanctity" of marriage as an institution threatened by the possibility of same-sex marriage being legalized?

The questions posed in public discourse caused many more to emerge as I began to examine this debate as a researcher. As I attended rallies and other public events, met with people and examined media coverage pertaining to same-sex marriage, I began to wonder what, fundamentally, is the issue? Why, suddenly as it seems, has gay marriage become *the* defining issue of the gay rights movement? Why are gays discriminated against when they pursue legal marriage? Why do gays seek legal marriage in the first place and what benefits are associated with marriage? Conversely, what is at stake for both supporters and opponents to same-sex marriage – what are they trying to lay claim to or protect, and what will be lost for both sides regardless of outcome? Why marriage? Why now?

Through my ethnographic research, I seek to demonstrate that this is not only an argument over a lexicon. This debate revolves around a vocabulary embedded with ideology while simultaneously being a struggle for recognition. Gays and lesbians are a systematically marginalized minority and I argue the denial of legal marriage for gays and lesbians is a clear example of both symbolic and actual domination and subversion.

Why This Research Problem?

As Malcolm Crick states in his essay "Ali and Me," when any anthropologist begins a research topic they must first ask themselves: why *this* research problem? (1992) Addressing this question has itself become method as well as a fundamental instrument in determining how I positioned myself in this ethnographic endeavor. Russell Bernard, in his text *Research Methods in Anthropology*, further highlights that researchers must determine their personal interest in any research topic they engage in order for research to

be most successful (2002). The topic of same-sex marriage is a topic of political interest to me, as I see the denial of legal marriage to same-sex couples as a denial of fundamental citizenship rights and as a blatant strategy of discrimination against a group based solely on the public expression of their sexual orientation.

Were I to marry a biological woman, I would be granted not only the legal recognition of my union, but automatically have access to various federal and state tax benefits, healthcare benefits, childcare benefits and inheritance rights. However, should I chose to marry a biological man, these rights would not be guaranteed – nor would the legal recognition of my union. I and my partner would be at the mercy of others with regards to such benefits and have no legal protection of our union. Dependent upon third party interpretations of committed same-sex partnerships or their personal beliefs regarding sexuality, I could be denied recognition, the adoption of children, or the ability to visit my partner in the hospital and make health care decisions were he to be in a critical situation.

The social meaning of marriage, and the practices of marriage have changed throughout history; in present-day American society, legalized heterosexual marriage manifests itself in numerous forms. As a researcher, it would be impossible for me to address each argument for or against same-sex marriage or to fully exhaust the myriad of possibilities for research on this topic. It is my intention that this thesis highlights and briefly describes the arguments both for and against legal same-sex marriage and many of the innumerable complexities that lie within. Thus, in this thesis I examine marriage as

an ideological institution and practice, but primarily concentrate on examining both the demand for and the resistance to the extension of legal marriage to same-sex couples.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

When attempting any anthropological research, it is first necessary to conduct a literature review in order to familiarize oneself with previous research and theory on the topic. I have conducted a review of anthropological theory regarding gender, sexuality, inequality and social change. Feminist anthropology, queer theory and literature regarding the public sphere have emerged as theoretical frameworks in which I ground my own analysis and argument.

Feminist Anthropology & Queer Theory

Feminist anthropology emerged in the 1960's and 70's as a theoretical perspective calling attention to the absence of the voice of women in anthropological literature. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere compiled the anthology *Women, Culture, and Society* (1974) which was a fundamental collection on being female in a variety of cultures and addressing gender identity and social practices. This text, and much of the literature which followed, was "unabashedly partisan" in that it attempted to rectify the historical imbalances in the representation of women in anthropological literature (Erickson and Murphy 2003:146). Feminist anthropologists sought to present the female voice, perspective and lived experience through their own eyes and expose social and gender hierarchies, as well as the ways in which "resistance and whatever emancipatory practices may exist are grounded in everyday practice" (Ward Gailey 1987:204). As

feminist anthropology has developed, it began to investigate other sources of inequality such as race, national identity or social class. Fundamentally, feminist anthropological perspectives have sought to expose the cultural representations which assume the inferiority of certain groups, show the sources of those pre-dispositions in order to illuminate where lies the potential for change (Ortner 2004:371).

Feminist anthropology provides a background for approaching the issues of identity politics at play in queer theory. Some opposition groups to same-sex marriage have argued that homosexuality itself is "unnatural" and thus, by default, same-sex marriages are fundamentally flawed. This approach has been termed the heteronormative defense by many queer theorists (Butler 1990, Hertzog 1996, Kirsch 2000) who state those who oppose homosexual identities not only as a political identity but as an identity at all are perpetuating a hegemonic (Gramsci 1971) centrality for the purposes of marginalizing that which is not heteronormative. The heteronormative position is based in biological determinism and on the assumption that heterosexual relations are the "normal" and, hence, "correct" way to be. This heteronormative ideology has been described in public sphere literature as "a fundamental motor of social organization in the United States, a founding condition of unequal and exploitative relations throughout even straight society" (Warner 2002:205-6).

Feminist anthropological theory also contributes to queer theory in its attempt to discredit cultural pre-dispositions toward heteronormativity. The perspective of feminist anthropology can easily be applied to current issues of sexual inequality, identity politics, and the politics of citizenship at play in the denial of the legalization of same-sex

marriage. Queer theory attempts to draw on feminist anthropology and posit itself as a deconstructive strategy with aims at denaturalizing heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, society and the relationships between them (Sullivan 2003). Furthermore, as feminist anthropological theory challenges notions of marginalization on the basis of gender, queer theory seeks to challenge marginalization on the basis of sexual orientation.

In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler describes gender as "performative" (1990). Butler further describes heterosexuality as little more than a limiting set of the ways in which we can construct identity. Identity, for Butler, is a system of "socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (Butler 1990:16-17). This is exactly what Pierre Bourdieu described as the doxa. In his text *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu states that "every established order tends to produce…the naturalization of its own arbitrariness"; Bourdieu termed this the arbitrary naturalization of the "doxa" (1977). To use Gramsci's terms, this hegemonic "common sense" is what is now under fire in the debate over same-sex marriage (1971). Marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman is Bourdieu's doxa and Gramsci's "common sense." This model of marriage has been arbitrarily naturalized and, in the face of attempts to change this definition and practice, is that which must now be "defended" and "protected."

The Public Sphere

In order to challenge these notions of heteronormativity, gay and lesbian activists have sought to secure a space in the public sphere so that their voices may be heard and they may solidify a political identity with which to not only legitimize their sexual

identity, but as a means via which they gain legitimacy for that identity vis-à-vis heterosexuals. Jurgen Habermas defines the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere as

> the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (1989:27)

This is precisely the manner by which advocates and opponents of same-sex marriage have positioned themselves. They are groups of shared ideologies coming together to engage in a discourse over the rules of society. Particularly, supporters of same-sex marriage engage the public sphere as marginalized identities seeking a voice and a collective identity. Groups who adopt this strategy do so as a means by which to imagine themselves as interlocutors of the state, while seeking to build their numbers through adding others to their cause (Guano 2002).

In their introduction to the text *Counter Publics and the State*, editors Asen and Brouwer state that those engaging Habermas' public sphere with voices of dissent contribute to the "ongoing emancipation" of their "counter" public-ness (2001). These counter publics are groups marked by "unequal access to power and uneven distribution of symbolic and material resources" that serves to "advantage dominant social groups and disadvantage subordinate groups in public discourse" (Asen and Brouwer 2001:8). In this debate, dominant groups – the publics – limit the access to legalized marriage from same-sex couples. This limitation establishes a method through which they not only assert their proper ownership of the term and symbol "marriage" but also the institutions and ideologies themselves. Simultaneously, this denial of legally recognized marriage

for same-sex couples asserts the dominant groups' power over the socially unequal counter publics via an adherence to the hierarchical heteronormative ideologies of marriage.

The Myth of Marriage – Marriage as a Tool of Domination & Capitalism

The idea of marriage as a union between one man and one woman is itself based upon a Eurocentric view of kinship (Blackwood 2005). Marriage is a deeply gendered institution in the West and popular notions of heterosexual couple-centered marriage do not prevail cross-culturally. In her analysis of anthropological theory on marriage and kinship, Evelyn Blackwood argues that anthropology itself has produced and replicated a normative model of marriage which maintains at its core a dominant heterosexual male (2005). When addressing same-sex marriage, she states, it is thus always in relation to that normative model. I argue that it is fundamentally important to recognize this model itself as a tool of discrimination; excluding same-sex relations and non-monogamous relationships from the outset. Furthermore, this normative model of marriage serves to perpetuate the reproduction of dominant male power through its conformity to the heterosexual male core archetype. As gay rights activists seek the right to marry, they subscribe to this normative model and, though seeking to subvert that model by allowing same-sex couples access to it, they are simultaneously reinforcing the normative and exclusionary ideology of coupled marriage. In seeking the right to legally marry, gay rights activists reinforce the dogma surrounding marriage by asking for access to it as well. This reinforcement is not only exclusionary by withholding recognition to those

who are non-monogamous or who do not seek marriage or any union at all, but it also perpetuates the married-unmarried hierarchical paradigm which serves to differentiate and marginalize, and which in the United States affords married persons various legal rights and protections.

Evelyn Blackwood (2005) notes that government continues to define marriage and kinship through the deployment of legal systems and ideologies, and that, through this deployment, the state maintains its power over granting recognition. She draws parallels to the current debate over same-sex marriage in the U.S. and also argues that, as gays and lesbians continue their crusade for legal marriage rights, a fundamental strategy employed by conservative opponents has been to "enshrine marriage in glowing terms as a sacred bond between a man and a woman" (Blackwood 2005).

When the language of the family is employed by religious leaders and politicians alike to pronounce the decline of the family and a societal absence of morality, what they target are non-procreative sexualities. This method is meant to target these non-procreative sexualities and ascertain methods to discipline production, organize consumption and maintain power (Lancaster 2003). The family is what capitalist societies rely on to continue the production of labor – procreating offspring – which ultimately continue the production of commodities for consumption. The family, according to Marx (1845), is the place where the division of labor for the sake of capitalist exploitation takes place. Marx argued that men enslave their wives and children in the traditional family, as they maintain control as the heads of the household who supervises not only the division of labor, but the property which his family becomes.

Eleanor Leacock (1983) maintains that in the practice of marriage in capitalist societies, men and women enter into a union wherein the man works outside the home to produce commodities which have economic value. Women work inside the home, maintaining the household and caring for children. Leacock further asserts that women's work is not as valued as work which creates commodities and, therefore, this family structure is the origin of gender hierarchies and is inseparable from exploitation. Women's labor serves to produce and maintain cheap labor pools – children – for capitalist exploitation and is undervalued because it produces no exchangeable commodity. By clutching onto this model of marriage, I argue that conservatives are using religious fundamentalism and Christian morality to shroud their adherence to capitalist ideology and the desire to preserve this economic system.

Christianity has historically been used as a method to perpetuate the needs of capitalism (Kirsch 2000). It has been used to condemn sexual acts outside of marriage and even within marriage if the purpose was not for procreation. This stance was used to ensure the continued production of the family unit, and thereby the subordination of women and the production of children; the labor pools. If same-sex marriage were to be granted legal recognition, biological procreation would be impossible between the two same-sex partners. This already results in non-procreative sexualities turning to adoption or involving a third party if they choose to have children. When non-procreative sexualities have children, this represents a reproduction of an ideology which is not in line with the capitalist structure of the family and the manner by which that structure is reproduced and maintained becomes threatened. This leads to conflicts over how to

produce a labor force whose values allow for the production and accumulation of economic value (Lancaster 2003). The "family" is given charge of overseeing what can not be directly administered by the state and is in place and targeted for being "defended" in order "to keep well-behaved subjects in line and on the path to a well-adjusted, well-disciplined, and above all else *productive* citizenship" (Lancaster 2003:340). Opponents to both homosexuality itself and the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples view them as threatening the agenda of maintaining and reproducing the socialization of the heteronormative nuclear family. As women, queers and other minorities have challenged the traditional nuclear family construct, they have been marginalized and their roles in and integration with society have been not only distorted but also wholly denied (Leacock 1983). Essentially, in any economy where children are necessary for the production of a household, relationships seen as potentially undermining the concept of the traditional family structure are seen as compromising the stability of that family structure itself and, thus, the society at large (Kirsch 2000). The perceived threat of same-sex marriage has mobilized an entire movement against it which has originated in the United States among the conservative Christian Right.

Conservatives in the United States have used religion as a primary shroud for their argument against not only same-sex marriage, but homosexuality itself, as well as abortion, divorce, single-parent families, sex education in schools, and women's rights. The Christian Right has become a populist movement seeking to maintain "traditional family values" and target anything they deem not adhering to those values in their "Culture Wars" (Berlet and Lyons 2000). The Christian Right has instigated a "family

values campaign" which has cut into and across political lines. "The Christian Right's core agenda was the reassertion of heterosexual male dominance and traditional gender roles throughout society" (Berlet and Lyons 2000:231). I argue this agenda seeks to maintain and fortify capitalism's hold on and domination over "the family." This argument relies on the idea that Christianity has become a tool of capitalism and vice versa wherein each redirects legitimate threats on the other's existence by using the scapegoats of these "morality issues" to detract the populace into anxiety over "threats" such as homosexuality (Berlet and Lyons 2000). Using the Bible and religious rhetoric to rally conservative Christians to the voting polls, the Christian Right has used these morality issues to refortify its hold on its populace by telling them they are threatened, telling them their family is threatened, telling them what the threat is – in this case same-sex marriage – and evoking their political action to vote against the threat.

It is precisely this traditional family structure that becomes threatened when two men or two women seek to create a household not firmly rooted in the normative model of the family but then use the same vocabulary heterosexuals use to describe their relationships or household structures. When this happens, the normative model of the nuclear family comes to be viewed as under siege by those seeking to maintain control over it.

Status and Symbolic Domination

The appropriation of the language of the family by non-heterosexuals can then be seen as a battle over meaning and as one important way in which the sexually marginal struggle to assert the validity of their way of life (Weeks 2001). According to Weeks,

the word “marriage” is a “symbolic loaded term” (Weeks 2001:38) and the appropriation by gays and lesbians of the term “marriage” to define their own relationship identities and vie for legal recognition of those unions has resulted in the refortification of the symbolic power marriage holds in the first place. Those with access to marriage maintain the power over the symbol of marriage and refuse access to same-sex couples, thereby fortifying their marginalization. “Marriage confers status: to be married, in the eyes of society, is to be grown up” (Rauch 2004:20). Marriage is, in many ways, identity and this identity has been transformed into a political and cultural tool.

Homosexuality itself is “a degraded status” and opposition to same-sex marriage reiterates that legal recognition of same-sex relationships would be an unacceptable state endorsement of a “degraded status” (Eskridge 2002). Same-sex marriage and, thus, the legal recognition of homosexuality as a viable political identity would result in the reproduction of certain socialization patterns and a normalization of what Bourdieu called “heterodoxy” – that same-sex couples would become the norm. Thus, the threat of the heterodoxy becoming doxic (“natural”) could be seen as a fundamental attack on the orthodoxy of those who now hold the power of recognition.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic domination best address the issue of same-sex marriage in its relation to heterosexual marriage. To make use of marriage as a cultural resource is based upon one’s ability to associate with the prestige of “cultural tools” such as taste and distinction in order to navigate themselves into positions where access to resources is unhindered (Bourdieu 1984). I argue that marriage, in

contemporary American society, is itself a cultural tool. Marriage is the manner by which people grant and gain status and recognition not only of their union, but also for the legitimacy of their family. Once access to the resources of the cultural tool of marriage is available, then it grants access to the symbol of family thereby affording access to a normative model of "family." The access to this "normalcy" and the status that comes with the recognition of family allows people who have access to that status to better navigate their interactions with the dominant core of American society and its valorized view of marriage and family.

Bourdieu discusses how "complex societies" are those societies comprised of any number of fields (i.e. intellectual, economic, religious, etc.), which can all be in cohabitation spatially and temporally, but can determine internal "logics" and reason, i.e. policy, which best address the specific field, rather than the overall entirety of the society (1977). Within the fields, the total imposition of one group's set of taxonomies upon another's results in the production of a "natural" order, or doxa. These doxa provide social determination of what is accepted, endorsed and perpetuated as the common "natural" order, while the order of the dominated or dissenting viewpoints is rendered "unnatural."

This is symbolic domination in that the doxa of the particular group creating social protocol reflects the moral, ethical, religious or cultural center of the group creating these taxonomies – group doxa to serve group interest/protection. In essence, that which does not adhere to these taxonomies – or "natural" society, becomes dominated by the symbolic norm, or doxa. Bourdieu asserts that the fate of groups is

bound up with the words that designate them, while the power to impose recognition depends on the capacity to mobilize around a name (1991). Hence the importance of clarifying what American society deems to be the definition of marriage in order to lay claim to the power of recognition – the essence of the issue.

Many long-term partners in same-sex relationships have had symbolic ceremonies designed to parallel "traditional" wedding ceremonies. These ceremonies have served as ritualistic and individualistic social practices designed and implemented at the personal/local level – yet these resulting personal and social policies/commitments are not recognized by government agency or most social institutions. Without the validity of "official" recognition by governmental agency or the right to chose appropriate health care or make life decisions for partners in case of emergency, how much weight outside the realm of sentiment do these unions carry?

For each of my informants, marriage as an American institution today has been categorized as symbolic of the validity of and commitment to a relationship between partners who wish to share their lives together, particularly those initiated by romantic interest/desire. Using Bourdieu's definitions, I argue that the cultural tool used by the 'powerful' in this situation is the legal recognition of marriage and the denial of that legal recognition for same-sex unions. Marriage is a symbol and to be married conveys status in American society. It is the legal and public recognition of not only a relationship, but of sexuality and of the family. The exclusion of the access to this resource is the method by which the doxa maintains its symbolic domination and power by withholding that recognition.

The Language of Marriage – What is Marriage Anyway?

Anthropologist Edmund Leach attempted to define marriage in his article "Polyandry, Inheritance and the Definition of Marriage" (1955). He abandoned this attempt, however, noting that it would be impossible to find one definition for the word or varied practices of marriage which would hold true cross-culturally. Marriage around the world usually refers to heterosexual unions – though there are important exceptions to this model (Stone 2004). As anthropologist Linda Stone (2004) points out, the Nuer of Africa practice woman-woman marriages. Anthropological research has shown that the practice and ideology of marriage varies widely cross-culturally and throughout history. There have been well-documented instances of woman-woman marriage in West Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa and the Sudan (O'Brien 1977). There are numerous instances of men who preferred to live as women in Native American tribes taking other men as husbands (Nanda 2000). Furthermore, Stone points out that anthropologists have attempted to define marriage throughout the history of the discipline, but continue to find that attempt problematic due to the variation in marriage practices across the globe. Essentially, marriage itself exemplifies variation and, historically and cross-culturally, it manifests itself in monogamous, polygamous, polyandrous as well as heterosexual and same-sex unions.

To better define the issue of same-sex marriage in the United States, it is beneficial to start by ascertaining the dominant definition of marriage. In mainstream U.S. culture, an instrumental source to determine what "marriage" means is the

dictionary. To attempt to discern a general definition of marriage, I consulted six dictionaries – one of which was a children's dictionary – so as to incorporate what definition lexicographers reflect to us from dominant cultural ideas. These definitions are as follows:

The American College Dictionary (1964:746)
Marriage – n. 1. the legal union of a man with a woman for life; state or condition of being married; the legal relation of spouses to each other; wedlock. 2. the formal declaration or contract by which act a man and a woman join in wedlock. 3. any intimate union.

The American Heritage Dictionary (1985:768)
Marriage – n. 1. a. the state of being married; wedlock. b. the legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife. 2. the act of marrying or the ceremony of being married; wedding. 3. a close union.

Longman Advanced American Dictionary (2000:899)
Marriage – n. 1. the relationship between two people who are married. 2. the state of being married 3. the ceremony in which two people get married.

Scholastic Children's Dictionary (1996:318)
Marriage – n. 1. the state of being married; the relationship between husband and wife. 2. the wedding ceremony.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (1987:369)
Marriage – n. 1. the state of being married. 2. a wedding. 3. a close union.

The World Book Dictionary (1986:1274)
Marriage – n. 1. the act or fact of living together as husband and wife; relation between husband and wife; married life; wedlock. 2. the condition of being a husband or wife.

Of these six definitions, four state that marriage is to be defined in terms of the relationship between a man and a woman, while only two state marriage as "the state of being married" or "a close union" without being gender specific.

Anthropologist Ellen Lewin (2005) suggests that to vote on same-sex marriage is to vote on the dictionary – a cycle of "obviousness" that must be broken. "Common

sense" and Bourdieu's doxa rule in this domain, and, according to Lewin, they must be altered to include those who do not fit these conventions. Thus, the language of family used by many non-heterosexual people today can be seen as both a challenge to conventional definitions, and an attempt to broaden them. To use the terminology of family and marriage, gay rights activists demonstrate a desire for legitimacy and an attempt to build something new; an identification with existing cultural definitions, and a simultaneous effort to subvert them (Weeks 2001).

I Do – Language as Power

The stylized forms of speech utilized by many conservatives in the United States – the rhetoric of "protecting" and "defending" marriage – are an institution in and of themselves and represent the authority of those who lay claim to the language and, hence, the symbols.

> The act of institution is thus an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it *signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be. (Bourdieu 1991:121)

Opposition groups to same-sex marriage have laid claim to the institutionalized language of marriage and of the family as their own, and as the "natural" way – the "proper" and "right" way – not to be extended or adapted to include same-sex couples. In doing so, these claims and the expressions of this debate in the public sphere serve to firmly illustrate who exactly is and who isn't allowed access to marriage.

> On a practical level, ideology is operationalized and generalized through language. Language provides the symbols and connections by which we interpret the world. (Kirsch 2000:41-2)

Queer theorist Max Kirsch argues that the ideology of those opposed to same-sex marriage – and homosexuality in general – are threatened by what they see as deviant having access to the same cultural tools as they do – the institution and practice of marriage and family. The ideology of those opposed is firmly rooted in the ideology of the family and of marriage as a sacred institution. The language used by those attempting to limit the access of use of these terms by "others" is a method by which they not only assert their proper ownership of the terms and the institutions themselves, but their power over the dominated and marginalized gay and lesbian community. Additionally, in legal acts initiated to ban same-sex marriage, opposition and fundamentalist groups have laid claim to these institutions and the words – the symbols – which shape their ideologies and rhetoric, if not their practice. Opposition groups have evoked hostile terms to use in their attempt to ban same-sex marriage by introducing the Federal Defense of Marriage Act and stating that marriage as an institution needs to be "protected." Language, therefore, becomes a political construction unto itself (Kirsch 2000). To use words like "defense" and "protected" in reference to marriage being adapted to accommodate same-sex couples reinforces the rhetoric that there is something sacred which is under attack or that needs to be rescued and asserts the opposition's claims to be the group with ownership of these symbols and – hence – the group with power.

Language is power and the debate over same-sex marriage constitutes an exercise of that power for political ends (Kirsch 2000). In the last election, language and who gets access to the language of marriage and family was a core political battle-ground. Christian fundamentalists and Republican party leaders engaged in what William

Eskridge termed the "politics of preservation" (2002). Essentially, those opposing same-sex marriage used the rhetoric of "defending" and "protecting" marriage in order to mobilize their voting public. Thus it becomes evident that not only is this an example of where such politics can prove successful, but it has expanded the support base of that political ideology – people normally unconcerned with gay rights suddenly have been incited to antigay activism by the marriage issue (Eskridge 2002). 2004 was a Presidential election year, and a year in which the political landscape in the United States was dramatically divided. For opponents to President Bush and the Republican party in general, the war in Iraq proved a primary point of criticism. The potentially negative attention and press regarding the war was often diverted through implementation of this "politics of preservation" strategy. "Moral" issues were evoked to rally people to vote in line with a conservative agenda and the rhetoric of defending marriage came to be seen as a rallying point which Republican politicians perpetuated as being their own. Those opposed to same-sex marriage used tactics which evoked language as symbols which then equated to an ideology of what "should" and what "should not" be. In doing so, voters in the eleven states which had proposed constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage overwhelmingly approved such bans.

Queer Politics

Homosexuality has existed throughout history. Homosexuality being translated into a gay or lesbian political identity, however, is a relatively new cultural development. This forging of a group identity has been described by many as truly becoming openly public in the post-World War II era (Herdt 1992, Blasius 1994, D'Emilio 1998). When

police raided a gay bar in New York called the Stonewall Inn in 1969, gays took to the streets in several nights of rioting in what has been hailed as the watershed political result to the growing dissatisfactions gays and lesbians felt in regards to the social oppression of homosexuality. This act resulted in transforming the cultural mobility of gays and lesbians in the United States (Herdt 1992) and manifested itself over time into a movement of gays and lesbians seeking to emancipate themselves from the laws, policies, and attitudes which have relegated them to a position of inferiority in American society (D'Emilio 1998). At the time of the Stonewall riots in 1969, homosexuality had already ceased to be an "invisible" phenomenon as more and more people participated in the gay subculture and as certain conservative groups denouncing homosexuality heightened their campaign against it. As people increased their public denouncement of homosexuality, gays and lesbians began to forge together in an increasingly vehement struggle for recognition and tolerance of their lifestyles. "In attempting to build a politics based on sexual preference, the homophile movement in effect helped create the community that, later, was able to sustain a liberation effort" (D'Emilio 1998:249). This effort was heightened in the 1980s when AIDS began to appear on the public radar and when anti-gay sentiment and fear gained speed in public discourse due to gays being stigmatized as *the* carriers and perpetuators of the AIDS epidemic (Herdt 1992). As a result of these anti-gay stigmas, it became all the more important for gay and lesbian communities to shape an identity complete with a political voice. As gay and lesbian communities began to fight back against the stigma of AIDS and call for civil rights, such as non-discrimination acts at educational institutions among others, "the quality of gay life in

America was permanently altered as a furtive subculture moved aggressively into the open" (D'Emilio 1998: 239).

As a gay "ethos" emerged, which has been described as a way of life more encompassing than either a sexual orientation or a lifestyle, so too has the progression of this community moved toward the desire to have a viable political voice (Blasius 1994). Through this conscious construction of not only a community identity, but a political one, the gay movement has attempted to transform itself from asserting the right to exist in the first place, to the call for equal and civil rights. This shift and the public identification of one's sexuality has emerged as what Mark Blasius calls the move from being "homosexual" – based on sexual practice – toward being "gay" and "lesbian" – based on shared community and an assumed political ideology (1994). This construction of a political identity with its marker being sexual orientation is what is now calling for marriage equality in the face of being denied legal marriage. Examining the manner by which this identity has engaged the political arena in the debate over the legalization of same-sex marriage and the opposition it has faced is what this thesis highlights through ethnographic research framed by the theoretical perspectives laid out in this section.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

Research in cultural anthropology is based upon ethnography. Examining the unit of analysis by participant or unobtrusive observation and interviews with those whom the cultural anthropologist studies is the fundamental method by which data are gathered and examined. The ethnographic methods I have employed have centered on participant observation – the hallmark of cultural anthropology – as well as in-depth semi-structured interviews with informants. The first such practice of participant observation was at Georgia State University's Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics' *Symposium on Same-Sex Marriage* in March 2004. This symposium consisted of three panels, each with speakers on different topics who gave prepared statements both supporting and opposing same-sex marriage. Following these statements, the panelists engaged each other and the audience in a question-and-answer session. At this event, I met and spoke with several panelists as well as other audience members both securing informants and establishing contacts.

In the early stages of research, participant observation also included attending a book reading of *Gay Marriage; Why It's Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America* by Jonathan Rauch (2004), a writer and Fellow at The Brookings Institute: a think-tank in Washington, D.C. This reading was followed by an audience dialogue with the author primarily in support of same-sex marriage. While attending both of these events, I used snowballing techniques and secured interview subjects, learned about various local events relating to the issue and discovered numerous other sources for my

literature review. I have also collected data from media articles in national and local publications highlighting the debate over same-sex marriage, and have continually done so since February 2004. Through the utilization of snowballing techniques while talking with attendees at these events, I obtained the contact information for the campaign manager at Georgia Equality; a local gay rights advocacy group affiliated with the national gay rights organization, Human Rights Campaign.

After contacting the Georgia Equality campaign manager in April 2004, I began volunteering at Georgia Equality later that summer. I have continued my involvement with the organization and gained a position on the Events Committee. I have attended numerous meetings at Georgia Equality with leaders in the local gay community who organized the effort to defeat the amendment which made same-sex marriage illegal in Georgia. Though the amendment ultimately passed in November 2004, meetings are continually being organized to initiate a campaign to reverse that decision as unconstitutional. The group is continuing with plans to lobby public officials for their support and embark upon a state-wide publicity campaign in an effort to alter public perceptions of the gay community and ultimately overturn the amendment.

As a participant observer, I attended two protest rallies held at the Georgia State Capitol building. These two rallies, held on October 10 and October 27, 2004, were organized by supporters of same-sex marriage and were held in front of the capitol building. These protests were attended by supporters and opposition groups alike, and both resulted in police and media attention.

Having obtained approval for this research from the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve informants. Previously, I had conducted several brief interviews with informants in order to collect baseline data on this topic as well as engage in snowballing techniques to secure other informants. Among this informant pool are homosexual subjects who identify themselves as domestic partners and have participated in some form of a commitment ceremony. Additionally, the informant pool consists of self-identified heterosexual married people and religious leaders who both support and oppose same-sex marriage. These religious leaders were speakers at the aforementioned *Symposium on Same-Sex Marriage* with whom I have maintained contact and conducted interviews.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews took place in the summer of 2005 and lasted approximately one hour each. Questions were asked regarding the informants' beliefs and views on the practice and definition of marriage. Questions regarding their religious beliefs were also asked. Extensive notes from these interviews were transcribed into my personal computer and saved in an encrypted file in order to ensure the confidentiality of the data. Informed consent forms were also presented to each interview participant and signed copies are kept on record.

In June 2005 I attended the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society's conference at San Francisco State University. The conference was sponsored by the university and the National Sexuality Resource Center. At the conference, I attended panel discussions on same-sex marriage issues and a plenary session where anthropologists Gilbert Herdt and Ellen Lewin spoke on their work on the

issue. This conference provided additional sources for my literature review and critical insight into how anthropologists can posit themselves as advocates in this debate. Additionally, on October 26, 2005, I attended a panel discussion at The Carter Center in Atlanta entitled *Keeping Church and State Separate: Redefining the Marriage Debate* hosted by a local law firm, the American Constitutional Society for Law and Policy and Lambda Legal; a gay rights advocacy law coalition. Speakers at this panel included a professor of Constitutional Law at Emory University, a staff attorney at the Southeastern Regional Office of Lambda Legal and a local pastor – all who spoke in favor of same-sex marriage.

Attending the various public events I have described was crucial to my research in order for me to be able to utilize the "public sphere" as a conceptual tool in my analysis of this debate. Through observation at these events, I was able to witness the manner by which various people and activist groups presented their ideologies and rationales for their positions on same-sex marriage to the public. Observing the various discourses presented by both sides of this argument in the public sphere allowed me to witness the frameworks from within which activists sought validity. Religion, politics, notions of the family, and civil rights were among the devices employed by both sides debating legalized same-sex marriage, each of which were expressed publicly at these various events. Additionally, the ways in which both supporters of and opponents to same-sex marriage reacted and represented their own positions in reference to their opposition proved to be public spectacles of their own, making attendance at these events crucial to understanding the positions of both sides of this argument.

Finally, I employ discourse analysis in this thesis as I write about and interpret the ethnographic data I have compiled through the recording and transcribing of interviews and my experiences in participant observation. According to Bernard, the essence of discourse analysis lies in examining everyday encounters in order to ascertain and incorporate into one's work statements or events which are interpreted to have ideological content (2002). I make use of discourse analysis coupled with theoretical interpretations throughout this thesis in an attempt to allow both sides of this debate to be heard.

Research Challenges and Limitations

While attending the two protest rallies, I did not participate as a member in the demonstrations with either group. I observed both groups while taking field notes and photographs. At the latter of the two rallies, I was approached by a protestor in support of same-sex marriage and given a sticker with the image of a pink triangle to wear on my shirt. The pink triangle – a visual symbol of gay identity – was being utilized by the gay rights protestors as a means of identification and of communicating solidarity. My simply being at the rally, approaching the supporters' side of the street and remaining there seemed to signal to protestors that I was there in support of same-sex marriage. The opposition group, witnessing this exchange, immediately viewed me no longer as simply a passive observer, but as being on the "other" side. This was made clear by verbal comments made toward me as I later approached the opposition

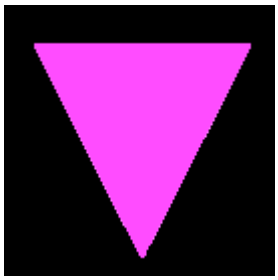


Figure 3.1

group's protest area. Regardless of the detachment I hoped to outwardly project to both groups for the benefit of my research, I had been inadvertently assigned not only a side of the argument, but an identity complete with an entire ideology.

At the protest rally on October 10, protest groups formed both in support of and in opposition to same-sex marriage. As I approached the site of the rally, I went first to the area where supporters of same-sex marriage were congregating. I began to photograph the scene, talk with protesters and walked to the various booths being set up in order to collect informational materials the groups were handing out. After doing this, I walked to the area where protesters in opposition to same-sex marriage were gathering. Having seen me walk toward them from the other group's area, several protesters began shouting at me and a few others who were walking with me from group to group. They assumed we were part of the gay rights protest, and that we were gay. They made various comments to us indicating their beliefs that we were sinners, and were condemned to Hell. They were not willing to talk with me and I was given a small card which on one side read "Press your thumb here." A large black spot was centered on the card with text underneath which stated that the spot would turn from black to blue if the card holder pressed their thumb hard to the card and if the person were a "good person." The other side of the card states that since the black did not, in fact, change to blue the cardholder must be a "bad" person, complete with a diatribe condemning homosexuals as "immoral."

These encounters illustrate how participant observation is grounded firmly in human inter-subjectivity (Adler and Adler 1987:31) and that I, as an ethnographer, need

to maintain an astute awareness of myself, my informants and the contexts within which any encounters took place. Though I do have strong personal and political beliefs which posit me on one side of this argument, when conducting my field work and interacting with and obtaining informants, I learned to maintain a heightened awareness of my presentation of self. How did my gender or perceived sexual orientation influence my access to informants? From the manner in which I dressed to the way I approached people, being conscious of the strong beliefs and emotions at play among the members of each group became an important practice itself.

Due to the nature of this research, I am often pre-supposed to be a gay man by informants. Am I gay, heterosexual, or bisexual? Does that matter at all? The assumption being: a straight man couldn't possibly care about gay rights. Thus, my subjects often assumed I must be gay because I chose this research topic. My political inclinations and research interests became appropriated as my identity when I spoke with informants or attended rallies or speeches.

Through my ethnographic experiences of being pre-supposed to be gay, being both afforded and denied access to informants based on that supposition, and being the target of discrimination, I must be conscious of my ethnographic interpretations and how they have been shaped by both my positive and negative interactions with informants.

Chapter IV

Ethnographic Research, Findings & Theoretical Interpretations

Setting the Stage

In Atlanta, gays and lesbians are a clear presence. This presence is not only a presence in terms of demographic numbers, but the presence of a community which has consciously used visual markers to create a space for itself as a method to assert itself as a viable and valid community. These markers, I argue, are not intended to identify only a sexual orientation, but have come to represent what the gay rights movement has worked to achieve – a community with an identity of its own, complete with legitimate claim and access to what Habermas termed the public sphere (1989). One primary space used for representation of this community is the neighborhood of Midtown Atlanta surrounding Piedmont Park, with its "center" at the heavily trafficked intersection of 10th Street and Piedmont Avenue.

Photo 4.1

Driving around Midtown Atlanta, one will see rainbow flags hanging on the fronts of homes or in the windows of local businesses; particularly near the intersection of 10th and Piedmont. The rainbow is a symbol which has been appropriated by the gay

community as a symbol of diversity – of many colors together. To display this flag is not only to display a sexual orientation, but to show affiliation with a publicly sexed political identity. Further examples of this are blue and yellow equal sign stickers displayed on cars. This symbol is given to donors to the Human Rights Campaign and Georgia Equality, two gay rights advocacy groups, and is displayed, again, not only as a marker of identity, but of political identity. The use of the equal sign itself, visually projects the message of these advocacy groups: equal rights for all. These markers demand a space in the public sphere and the display of these markers serve to assert gay and lesbian voices in the spheres of public opinion and political discourse – they publicly assert for the viewer the sexual orientation of those who display them.

Figure 4.1

In their attempts to create a space and identity within the public sphere, gay and lesbian activists are now coupling that collective community identity as a fundamentally political identity with motives at engaging and formulating the political public sphere. As gay and lesbian activists continue to establish themselves within the public sphere as legitimate occupiers of that sphere, they simultaneously attempt to use their space in the public sphere as a basis for entering the political arena and questioning the practice of the state. However, in the 2004 election the majority of the voting public demonstrated that, regardless of a group's identity within a public sphere, inequity within that sphere is still present as true access to equal citizenship rights continues to be denied.

The debate over the legalization of same-sex marriage and the proposed amendment which would define marriage as only between a biological man and a

biological woman, prompted gay and lesbian activists to mobilize themselves to oppose the amendment. The Human Rights Campaign, Georgia Equality, Georgians Against Discrimination, the Victory Fund, GayMarriageNow! and Lambda Legal – all gay rights advocacy groups – began efforts early in 2004 to "get their message out."

The message was that what would appear on the November 2, 2004, voting ballot throughout Georgia was fundamentally flawed, deceptive and unconstitutional and that voters should – to use a local slogan – "Vote No To Deception, No On One!" This slogan appeared on campaign signs posted throughout Atlanta, car bumper stickers, billboards, T-shirts and signs used at protest rallies. The ballot read:

> Shall the Constitution be amended so as to provide that this state shall recognize as marriage only the union of man and woman?

Photo 4.2

Speak Now, Or Forever Hold Your Peace:
Religious and Political Discourses in the Public Sphere

Michel Foucault (1982) viewed social institutions as being firmly rooted in discourses of power which shape relations between people at every level of a society. He argues that those who dominate these relationships inscribe their power by controlling economic and ideological conditions under which people are instructed to "be" a certain way. This "way to be" is wholly dependent upon who has control at the time and who is

designated to have authority. In the debate over same-sex marriage, heteronormative ideas about sexuality and the practice of family have been posited as the "way to be," holding authority to deny same-sex couples access to marriage. The response has been that many gay rights advocacy groups and individual activists have adopted strategies to identify themselves as similar to this "way to be."

Cultural action stems from people defining problems based upon their views of the world and their situations in it vis-à-vis the dominant "way to be" (Van Willigen 2002). I attempted to determine the views which sparked both the call for and opposition to same-sex marriage through conducting ethnographic fieldwork on this issue. I attended numerous social gatherings, political discussions, campaign strategy sessions at Georgia Equality and conducted interviews. On March 24, 2004, I attended Georgia State University's *Symposium on Same-Sex Marriage* sponsored by the Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics. The panel discussions I attended were entitled *Same-Sex Marriage and Religion* and *Same-Sex Marriage: Ethics and Public Policy*. While both discussions featured panelists who were both advocating and in opposition to same-sex marriage, *Same-Sex Marriage and Religion* seemed to spark the most heated audience responses. These "heated" audience responses were generally by those in favor of same-sex marriage speaking against the panelists who were denouncing it. It must also be noted that members of the audience were primarily advocates for same-sex marriage. This could be determined by observations of vocalized remarks in response to panelists, body movements which indicated to me discomfort and frustration and audience members making various dismissive and mocking gestures to panelists. As panelists

made remarks such as “homosexuality is not God’s plan” and “to choose to be gay, you have short-changed yourself,” many audience members audibly groaned in disapproval, shifted uncomfortably in their seats, and made comments to fellow audience members while making gestures of disbelief such as rolling their eyes or throwing their hands up in the air.

Panelists gave reasoning for their arguments, primarily based on religious scripture – Jewish and Christian – both for and against same-sex marriage as well as stating their beliefs on how to administer faith-based practices and interactions with members of the gay and lesbian community within their congregations. Though many people today recognize the importance of the division and separation of church and state, it is clear that, for many opponents of same-sex marriage, religion plays a large role in the way in which they define marriage. Thus, the discourse on same-sex marriage and religion is a primary and fundamental basis on which any understanding of the views of the majority of those against same-sex marriage must be built. It must be noted that the panelists from religious communities were speaking on behalf of their religious affiliations. They spoke nothing of legal issues or of potential bans on same-sex marriages or constitutional amendments. They – whether for or against – stated their religious views based on their interpretations of their religious tradition, whether Episcopalian, Baptist, Jewish or Methodist. Regardless of their lack of legal references, this panel sparked the most audience response. This is of particular note in that the vast majority of audience members who responded to the panel identified themselves as *not*

being religiously affiliated. In fact, only one audience participant self-identified as Christian when speaking.

Rabbi Joshua Lesser of Congregation Bet Haverim proposed during his address to the audience at the *Symposium on Same-Sex Marriage* that, "tradition has a vote, not a veto in how we engage issues today." Rabbi Lesser leads faith-based community social events and activities for members of the Atlanta gay and lesbian communities and their families every Friday evening at his synagogue. Attendees come – regardless of faith – to congregate with others who deal with similar issues in their personal lives as well and to enjoy social time with others. In a printed statement on a pamphlet promoting the synagogue, Rabbi Lesser hopes that "our synagogue community can serve as a catalyst for other groups in demonstrating its mission to support the gay and lesbian community." Religion's voice in this issue is a powerful one – one appropriated for both sides of the argument. "Gay marriage goes against God's plan for a man and a woman to join together. Homosexuals are disillusioned by lies from Satan," says Jan Scott, a mother of six and a member of the Reverra Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in an article in *The New York Times* (Kirkpatrick 2004). One of my self-identified Christian, heterosexual male informants states in an interview, "[Homosexuality] is just not God's way. It's not right so I don't support it." These sentiments are exemplified in the book *What's Wrong With Same-Sex Marriage?* in which televangelist James Kennedy (2004) provides readers with the following:

Top Twelve Reasons We're Opposed to Same-Sex Marriage:

1. God opposes homosexuality.
2. Same-sex marriage (and same-sex conjugal relations) goes against the natural order.
3. It goes against all of recorded history.
4. It will hurt children.
5. It cheapens marriage.
6. Same-sex marriage will unleash a legal nightmare.
7. It will sink the culture from civilization to barbarianism – a major step.
8. It destabilizes all of society.
9. It opens Pandora's box in the legalization of all sexual perversions. What's next?
10. It will hurt women for many reasons, including polygamy.
11. Same-sex marriage can produce no natural offspring.
12. The situation is scary for Christians because we become the bad guys. Same-sex marriage will criminalize Christianity.

Here, Kennedy provides his appraisal of both marriage and homosexuality. He heralds marriage as being the institution which maintains the natural order, culture and society itself, the position of women and procreation. Simultaneously, he positions homosexuality as undermining God, recorded history, children, society and Christianity. He paints homosexuality as a sexual perversion and relies on heteronormative notions of a “natural order” while fundamentally claiming God and Christianity as being “on his side.” Homosexuality and, thus, same-sex marriage are likened to barbarianism by Kennedy as his list of grievances illustrates the stance of a threatened conservatism laying claim to not only God, but also culture, society and all of recorded history.

A local religious leader who spoke at the same-sex marriage symposium argued his beliefs based on Biblical interpretations that what God described as “man” and what God described as “woman” were concrete and not able to be changed. Man and Woman,

he went on to say, were meant to be together and balance one another. This, he stated, was God's plan for humanity. At the same symposium, panelist Wiley Stevens of Dunwoody United Methodist Church said that the question of same-sex marriage is "not an issue of the worth of a person." He believed that person's worth would better serve God were they to "convert back to the way they were intended [heterosexual]." These statements are prime examples of the manner by which heternormative notions are employed by much of the Christian opposition in their approaches toward gays and lesbians – by denying gay and lesbian identity as valid at all and teaming that denial with the belief that homosexuality itself is "unnatural" and, thus, that heterosexuality is what is "intended."

One religious leader stated that the use of language and the definition of marriage should be reserved for only heterosexual relationships. He said, "even if a dog's tail is called a leg, it still has only four legs," implying that even if same-sex unions were to be called "marriages," that they would not be recognized by opponents to same-sex marriage such as himself as such. They weren't fundamentally congruent with his definition of marriage being that relationship reserved strictly for a man and a woman. This demonstrates that language and the term marriage is – coupled with other reasons – still of extreme significance and the debate over legally recognized same-sex unions. The word marriage itself, again, is a term loaded with symbolic and, in this instance, religious weight.

Conversely, in his speech at the symposium, one local Episcopal priest argued that there are, in fact, scriptural references in favor of same-sex relations. He also stated

that to interpret the Bible literally is to demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the time during which the Bible was written and the implications many of the words and phrases used in the Bible carry with them. He continued by explaining that the most common interpretation of the Bible reads gender as being defined by “strength” and that the Bible defines marriage as a balance of strength and weakness, most often read as man and woman. The interpretations this priest described confirms Leacock’s (1983) stance on the traditional family construct as a place for the division of labor and the exploitation of gender roles in capitalist societies, and also affirms Berlet and Lyons’ (2000) description of the Christian Right’s agenda of maintaining domination by the heterosexual male. Furthermore, that interpretation can be seen as what I argue in this thesis – that the Christian Right is using religion as its voice against same-sex marriage in order to serve as a tool for distraction from its true intent: to preserve the family for exploitation by capitalist economies.

Politicians also have publicly laid claim to religion as part of their arguments. Georgia State Representative Barbara Bunn (R-Conyers), an opponent to same-sex marriages, stated during the House of Representatives debate on March 31, 2004, “We've been called bigots, called full of hate and hate-filled. But the Judeo-Christian values that have held our society together for all these years is not equated to bigotry and hate.” (Lee 2004) By stating this, Bunn clearly defines this issue as, for her, one of religious significance. What is a legislator's such as this intentions and motivations? Are they promoting ethno/ego-centrist moral “goods” over legal “goods” to benefit and protect citizen's rights?

"If we allow this [same-sex marriages], then marriage is in danger in our country. It would further the breakdown of our society and our schools," says the official statement from the Christian conservative group the American Family Association.

Georgia State Representative Sue Burmeister (R-Augusta), an opponent of same-sex marriage, agrees that the institution of marriage would be in danger were same-sex marriages legalized. However, in her statement before the House of Representatives she stated gays and lesbians do not, after all, face any manner of discrimination under marriage laws in Georgia. She said,

> No one is preventing homosexuals from living together – all homosexuals have the right to get married and have that marriage sanctioned by the state. They just have to marry someone of the opposite sex – the same rights I have. If society is forced to redefine marriage, then we are establishing new and special rights (Lee 2004).

Burmeister's statement defines her belief that if gays and lesbians were to simply chose to marry someone of the opposite sex, rather than their partner of choice who is of the same sex, then this issue would simply disappear, and that gays and lesbians would be free to enjoy all the benefits and entitlements of legally recognized marriage under Federal and Georgia state law.

Making a Scene: Protests in the Public Sphere

Leading up to the elections, both supporters of same-sex marriage and its opponents began making public displays to demonstrate their arguments. The strategies included protest rallies being staged, visual markers increasing in number and increased media coverage. The primarily gay-targeted weekly newspaper, *Southern Voice*, ran numerous stories devoted to the debate complete with cover photos which served to both represent and reinforce rhetoric surrounding various aspects of the debate. For example, on the covers of the March 5 and September 3, 2004, issues, imagery was used which attempted to draw parallels between gay rights activists and activists of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Protesters at rallies did the same by holding signs drawing parallels between gay equality and racial equality.

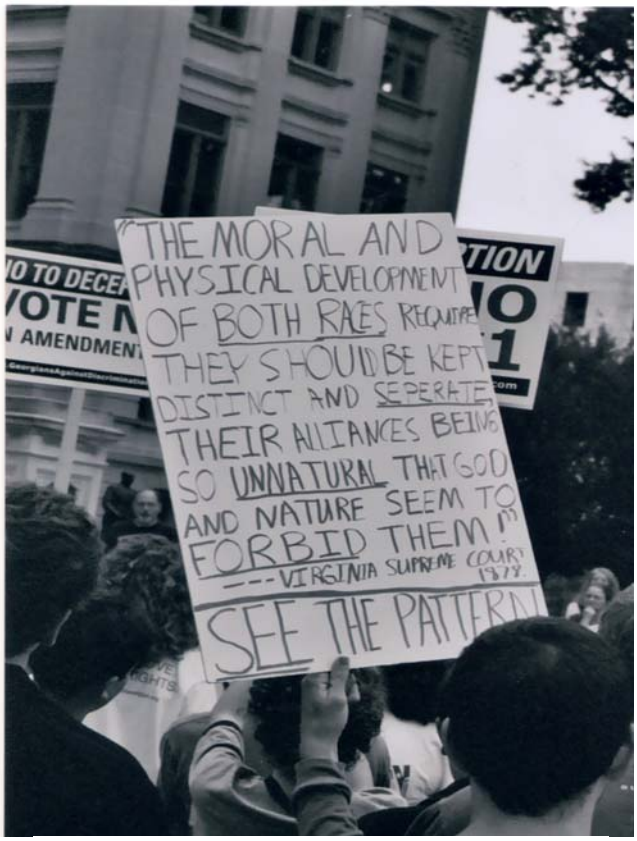


Photo 4.3

I attended two protest rallies held on October 10, and October 27, 2004. Both events were held at the State Capitol building and both were organized by supporters of same-sex marriage and attended by fellow supporters and opposition groups alike. The opposition groups at both rallies claimed to be representatives of Christian

morality and denounced homosexuality itself as an identity.

On October 10, a group of high school and university students staged a protest at the Georgia State Capitol building. This protest was designed by young supporters of same-sex marriage, many of whom identified themselves as gay or lesbian or as the children of same-sex couples. An opposition group, consisting of five members, stood alongside the young protesters. This opposition group used visual markers, signs and banners, in order to identify themselves not only as Christian, but, by implication, as morally superior. They carried signs which referenced Biblical verses and used text which condemned homosexuality as “immoral.” Additionally, one opposition protester who appeared to be the group's leader, wore a portable microphone with a small speaker attached which he used to verbally attack the gay rights protesters. The nature of these verbal attacks ranged in intensity, but nothing was said by the

Photo 4.4

opposition group about same-sex marriage – the issue the rally was intended to highlight.

What follows are statements made at the rally with a microphone and loudspeaker by members of the Christian group:

You all need diapers for your bleeding rectums.

You don't know the natural use for your rectum.

You're just lesbians with strap-ons.

You will burn in the lake of fire.

You hate God.

You're worshipping Satan in your homo church.

You're queer, you're going to hell, get used to it.
(modeled after the famous: We're here, we're queer, get used to it!)

AIDS is your judgment and the cure for homosexuality.

These statements were made repeatedly and sparked a heated and emotional response from the gay rights protesters who began yelling back at the Christian group. As tensions escalated, a camera crew from a local television station appeared and began filming the argument. Police presence grew from one patrol car to five and police officers forced the Christian group to the opposite side of the street, allowing the gay rights protesters to remain in front of the capitol building, since they had secured a permit to protest while the Christian group had not.

The gay rights protesters set up a microphone of their own with audio speakers. A series of speeches was given by people who made various arguments for same-sex marriage, ranging from drawing parallels to the Civil Rights Movement, calling the denial of the legalization of same-sex marriage discrimination and valorizing same-sex

couples through children of same-sex couples re-telling personal stories intended to highlight the "family-ness" of their family. These children aimed at showing the audience that they were, in fact, not maladaptive, but "normal" and thereby recognizing and reinforcing the normative ideology of "the family" – while laying claim to the language of "the family" as theirs as well.

Throughout the rally, continual references to the Bible were made as the Christian group attempted to assert their position as valid and with rightful claim to morality. Christianity served as a means for them by which they attempted to accomplish this goal. The opposition's claim to be a "correct" voice of opposition, and to be those with the dominant access to the public sphere, was rooted in Christianity as the ideology which, to them, inherently has a hold on and dominates the public sphere. This was particularly done when reading aloud from the Bible's Book of Leviticus. Chapter 20, Verse 13 states: "if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them." Through repeated quoting of this verse, the opposition attempted to lay claim to Christianity as "theirs." This strategy highlighted a Biblical reference to homosexuality

Photo 4.5

as an “abomination” in order to assert the argument that homosexuality is “wrong,” which automatically discredits any call for marriage equality. If the identity is invalid, by default their demands are as well.

The members of this Christian group did not denounce same-sex marriage, but homosexuality itself. Their remarks were primarily targeted at denouncing homosexual sexual practices and lifestyles as deviant and abnormal; maladaptive. As made clear by these statements, gay and lesbian identities continue to be under attack based on their sexuality. By continually being faced with the hurdle of existing in the first place, gays and lesbians are left with the challenge not only of legitimizing their identity, but also demanding recognition of that identity.

Throughout this rally, both sides attempted to lay claim to religion. One speaker with the gay rights protest group did so by stating, “my god made no mistakes and I'm perfect and I'm gay.” Other attendees held signs which read “We are all God's children. He loves us all!” Gays from a nearby church and synagogue were on hand to reassure the supporters that, yes, God was on their side and that religion is “all-inclusive and all loving,” as one speaker put it. One interview informant stated, “[it is] how you live not who you live with that’ll get you to Heaven.”

Photo 4.6

It is important to note this rally was held on a Sunday – a day when government business would not be conducted, traffic downtown near the Capitol building was minimal and the organizers were essentially "preaching to the choir." Unless one knew of this rally and wanted to make a special trip to attend, this message and the event of the rally itself was regulated to a short blurb on local television news coverage for an otherwise uneventful Sunday afternoon.

On October 27, 2004, a second rally was organized by gay rights activists who opposed the proposed amendment. This rally was again held at the State Capitol building, recognizing the iconicity of the building itself as a symbol of government power and of the political public sphere. This rally was held from 12:00 to 1:00 PM on a Wednesday afternoon. Thus, there was a more present audience, since the rally took place on a regular business day and during the typical lunch hour, when traffic around the capitol was high. Because this is a government facility on a day of business, there was a larger audience and heightened media attention.

At this second rally, another opposition group who were self-identified representatives of Christianity was present, as were religious supporters of same-sex marriage. A local gay rights activist and openly gay Jewish rabbi spoke on behalf of his synagogue and the rally was complete with a gospel choir singing songs of emancipation; including a spiritual with lyrics about overcoming the hardships of slavery. The group opposing same-sex marriage was, at this rally, much more subdued than the one previously described. They appeared, stood across the street from the protest, and simply stood – as their T-Shirts indicated they would. They wore red T-Shirts which read

"Just Stand" in large letters and "Ephesians 6:11" written underneath. This verse from Ephesians, a book of the Bible, reads, "Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." This group, part of an organization called Just Stand, stood across from the protest rally in an attempt to symbolically convey the meaning of the verse to which they referred; that they had claim to the armor of God and were standing against the wiles of the devil – homosexuality.

Photo 4.7

Gay and lesbian Christian speakers were on hand to quote Biblical references of their own, including:

"You shall know the heart of the stranger" and

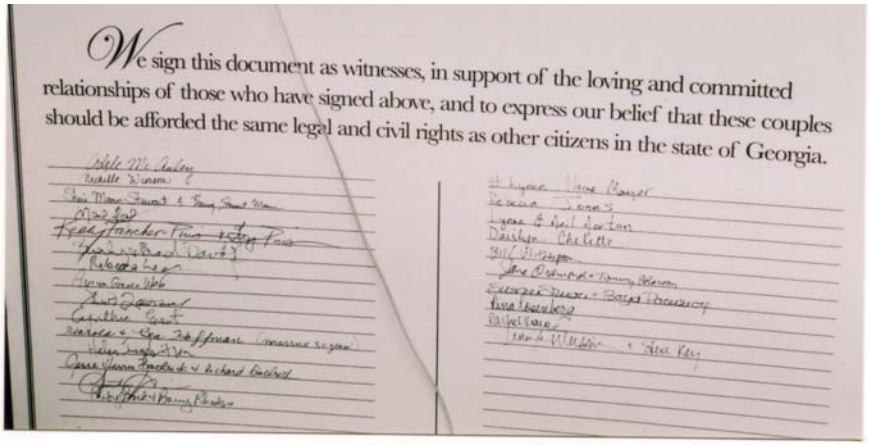
"You shall not oppress the heart of the stranger because you are a stranger too." A speaker who followed called the attendees to "take strength from Martin Luther King, Jr." In an attempt to highlight the severity of the proposed amendment, another speaker referenced opposition to same-sex marriage by people who do not oppose civil unions by saying, "even those who don't like the term 'marriage' and are o.k. with civil unions, this amendment would also make those illegal."

Speakers continued with one who identified gays and lesbians as the "last group legally able to be discriminated against and socially allowed and accepted to hate." One speaker quoted statements from the American Anthropological Association and the

American Psychological Association in support of same-sex marriage. The former reads:

> The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies.
>
> The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association strongly opposes a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples.

This statement was evoked as an attempt for scientific legitimacy by a speaker who further stated that opposition groups have "no rational or scientific reason for opposition, so they go for faith based opposition…my faith leads me differently."



Of particular interest at this rally, was the heralded attendance of straight couples. The rally itself was called "Straights in Solidarity" and the promoted feature of this rally was the signing of

Photo 4.8

a large document on poster-board. This document was meant to signify that those who signed it were legally married in the State of Georgia and that they were symbolically relinquishing their marriage licenses and the rights and privileges granted them from being married. They did this by stating they would not partake of an institution which is denied to gays and lesbians. These documents were signed by straight couples in attendance and then given to openly gay state legislator Pat Gardner, who was also in attendance and spoke at the rally.

This rally was very much a theatrical spectacle – complete with choirs singing emancipatory songs, symbolic acts of protest by both supporters of same-sex marriage and their opposition and continual parallels to the Civil Rights Movement being invoked. This theatricality was exhibited with clear intentions, and, I argue, as a means by which both groups of protesters sought to validate their presence in the political public sphere. Guano's analysis of theatricality argues that because it is a necessary tool for the public negotiation of an individual's political and legal persona, then it "is all the more fundamental for the self-definition and existence of social movements that posit themselves as interlocutors of the state" (2002:306).

As Guano points out in her examination of political public protests in Argentina, the spectacle of performance involved in a protest often results in the consolidation of a sense of community for protesters (Guano 2002). In the methods of spectacle enacted at this second protest rally in particular, the supporters of same-sex marriage reinforced their self-defined sense of community through drawing parallels to the Civil Rights Movement in an attempt to legitimize their argument over marriage rights today.

Additionally, the attempt was made to reinforce their own hold on Christianity by choosing to showcase classic “church-like” behavior such as choirs, group singing and speakers attempting to incite the crowd's emotional response. Finally, through this spectacle, the protesters attempted to secure not only a space for representation in the public sphere, but themselves as actors within the political public sphere as well.

From these two public protests, I found religion to be a central theme used by both supporters and opposition groups, as they both attempted to associate with what they view as the defining construction of present-day conceptions of marriage itself – a “traditional” idea of marriage as being only between a biological man and woman, perpetuated as heteronormative “tradition” in modern Judeo-Christian conservative discourses.

Throughout both rallies, both sides attempted to lay claim to religion. Gay rights activists clearly recognize the importance religion holds in defining marriage itself in the United States and in providing a lens through which their most ardent opposition views them as deviant and inherently “wrong.” At both protests, continual references to the Bible were made as the opposition attempted to assert their position as valid and with rightful claim to morality. Christianity served as a means by which they attempted to accomplish this goal. The opposition's claim to be a “correct” voice of opposition, and to be those with the dominant access to the public sphere, was rooted in Christianity as the ideology which, to them, inherently has a hold on and dominates the public sphere. Through perpetuating heteronormative claims on marriage, using religion as a means by which to discredit gay identity and by attacking homosexual sexual practices as “wrong”,

opponents of same-sex marriage seek to delineate the public sphere such that the argument for same-sex marriage could not be heard at all. Because, according to their opposition, the gay and lesbian voice should be afforded no volume.

Both opposition groups highlighted not the issue of the gay and lesbian community's political discourse or their identity as a political community, but condemned the sexual practices of gays and lesbians. Though the rally organizers had, no doubt, intended their rallies to be primarily focused on same-sex marriage and the upcoming vote on the amendment, they became as much about the gay rights protesters' right to occupy the public sphere in the first place as a legitimate identity capable of having a voice. This legitimacy was denied by the Christian groups who made their case against the gay and lesbian group based on the idea that homosexual sexual practices are a deviant and unnatural identity. Essentially, the opposition was there to challenge not the protesters' demands for the legalization of same-sex marriage, but their very right to exist as an identity in the first place.

Don Mitchell (1995) defines "space for representation" as any public place where a political movement can lay claim to the space in order for them to be seen. Gay rights activists and their opposition both claimed space in the public for their protest rallies to not only occur but to be politically visible. For the protesters to make use of a space for representation, they first had to gain permission to do so. In order to hold any public protest, forms must be filed, permissions must be granted, and police officers must be present to observe the happenings and keep everything "in-line." Having been granted a space for representation, the protesters carried out their protest in front of the State

Capitol building, a building embodying the "public." In this building, government – a "public authority" – takes place and it is a place where the "bourgeois public sphere" rules (Habermas 1989). Performing their protests at the capitol building guaranteed an audience, but I suggest they also secured the rallies as fundamentally political as they interplayed with the iconicity of the state – the capitol building itself being representative of the government both sides sought to address. Thus, we can see these protests being carried out as groups of private individuals, both for and against same-sex marriage, gathered in their appointed space for representation in attempts to engage the public authorities in a debate over the rules of access to resources – the various rights and recognitions associated with legal marriage.

Photo 4.9

Political protests themselves can be the voice and body used in public for a group with a need to be an interlocutor of the state (Guano 2002). Particularly when arguing for the extension of rights, any public relies on spectacles in order to showcase their identity. Protesters at these two rallies engaged in performances meant to draw attention to their identity, demand validation of their identity through the attention, and demand or deny access to legal marriage.

The location of these two rallies, at the capitol building, created a spectacle by which the protesters created a gaze. The gaze they created and acted for was both a gaze of spectacle and a Foucauldian panopticon. The panopticon, according to Michel Foucault (1977), is that which created a state of conscious and permanent visibility in order to assure the automatic functioning of power. The panopticon is something which represents power and, when people act they act according to the imposed power of the panopticon to be sure they act appropriately and "in line" just in case they're being watched. To engage in a political protest, an audience is necessary in order for the message of the protest to be heard. Simultaneously, a panopticon exists at any government institution which forces the protesters into being observed not only by an audience, but by an authority (Foucault 1977). They perform, then, in direct response to this panopticon and for the creation of a spectacle which will heighten their visibility *and* their surveillance. This thereby leads to heightened visibility and an increased number of people who can gaze. If a spectacle exists in terms of a political protest, the panoptic view is already in place in that the protester's space for representation has been assigned and is always already mediated by authority, whether it be the police or the government officials themselves. Therefore, I suggest that the awareness of the gaze from and to the audience, coupled with the panoptic presence, formulates the manner by which the performance of spectacle unfolds. Both groups at both protest rallies played to an audience with clear intentions to not only communicate their message, but to interact with and act for the audiences they wished to reach.

With This Ring, I…What? – Performing Marriage

"I define marriage [as] where two people love each other and want to spend the rest of their lives together," states one lesbian informant. And this sentiment is one I found repeated in many interviews – regardless of sexual orientation or political affiliation.

Marriage itself is a public performance in Western culture, particularly in contemporary American society. People wear wedding rings to identify themselves as married, host engagement parties for friends and families, send out wedding invitations, add themselves to wedding gift registries so that guests to their wedding can buy gifts for the couple, and have public wedding ceremonies with an audience followed by receptions and honeymoons. Weddings and marriages are themselves constructed pubic performances from their outset. Many gays and lesbians perform each of these rituals just as their heterosexual counterparts. The difference, however, is that when a heterosexual couple gets married, they also receive legal recognition of their marriage by the state – complete with the benefits and rights associated with being married. A homosexual couple does not.

Three same-sex couples I interviewed not only had commitment ceremonies with their family and friends present, but they also traveled to Canada, where same-sex marriage is legal, and were married there. These couples indicated that they were not likely to actually move to Canada, but the legal recognition – even though not from their home country – felt "more real" to them and they felt more secure knowing that, were

they to eventually chose to do so, they could move there and be granted legal protection of their union. These couples were all middle-class Caucasian couples who self-described themselves as politically "Left." They all indicated their belief that marriage was a commitment and a loving bond between two people and all spoke to the inequality they felt about being denied legal marriage. Each of these couples had held commitment ceremonies for their families and friends and wore their wedding rings on the traditional wedding finger. They all described in detail the way in which they became "engaged" and the excitement and sense of security they felt in their relationship after having the commitment ceremony. But, when asked about the legal ban on same-sex marriage, each of these couples shared a similar sentiment: that this ban was discrimination and that because they had the protection of legally recognized marriage in Canada, they felt more secure in their union – even though none of these couples live in Canada.

What, though, could the alternative be to same-sex marriages for those opposed to including them in the "marriage" definition? Civil unions are viewed by many opponents of same-sex marriage as a viable and legitimate compromise and that this should be enough to placate gay and lesbian couples. One informant addresses this issue directly in an interview. A white, middle-class, Canadian citizen who has lived in the United States since 1989, he celebrated his five-year anniversary with his partner in May 2005 with a trip to Vancouver. The purpose of this trip was for them to be legally married in celebration of their anniversary. The legal recognition and protection they would have in Canada sparked the couple's decision to travel there to legally be married, also granting them the option of moving there in the future and having their union nationally

recognized under Canadian law. "It's not a pseudo-marriage, as far as that country is concerned," he stated. "It doesn't depend on where you are in the country, unlike what you see here in the U.S." This sentiment was echoed by anthropologist Ellen Lewin, who described her feelings upon traveling to Canada to be legally married with her partner of eleven years as being "moved far more deeply than either of us expected; we came home feeling convinced that we really were 'married,' and that feeling has persisted even as we've had to confront our inability to officially claim any of the privileges that accompany marriage in our own country [the United States]" (2004: www.aaanet.org).

One lesbian couple I interviewed is considering moving to Massachusetts – a state with legalized same-sex marriage – in order to protect their interests after they have the child they are planning for now. They've been together for three years and, as they plan for their future children, they both expressed concern over one another's access to those children were something to happen to the birth mother as well as the partner who did not give birth to the child being able to legally adopt and be considered the child's legal guardian. They both work as nurses in the hospital where they met and, as they approach potential parenthood, their concerns over their child's well-being and each other's access to that child were "something to happen" were concerns they voiced. A different lesbian couple I know on a personal level has been together for over fifteen years. They had a commitment ceremony with their friends and family, exchanged vows and rings and consider themselves married. They are approaching their late forties and have written, with an attorney, a legal Last Will and Testament. In this document, they clearly name one another as each other's sole beneficiary in case of death. They each have included a

clause stating that the other should be given complete discretionary authority over their treatment in case of medical emergency. This clause, though listed clearly in each Living Will, can be completely and legally disregarded by whatever hospital administration they perchance would find themselves dealing with. Legally, this clause does not have to be observed by a hospital or residing physician if they deem it incongruent with their policies or personal beliefs. Another committed same-sex male couple state their belief that the "societal structure of marriage doesn't ratify, but fortifies the relationship" they share. They believe that though they took part in a personal commitment ceremony, were they to be granted legal recognition, their relationship would feel – to them – more validated. What is interesting to note in this couples' example is that they recently celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. After 50 years of life together as a committed couple, they still longed to be recognized and defined as legally married – to feel validated as they put it "really married." Highlighting what I argue to be the force and power of language at play in this issue, a lesbian informant who served as moderator at the *Keeping Church and State Separate* panel stated, "if we can say we're married, there's so much communicated in that word."

Thus, it is apparent that, for many gays and lesbians, the word "marriage" itself and the ability to be able to define their union as being "married" does carry with it significant weight. This weight matters to them, and I argue that being able to describe their unions as "marriage" and being granted the legal protection afforded marriage in the United States is an important part of this battle.

All or Nothing

The word "marriage", and the weight it carries with it, serves as the very reason many who may describe themselves as "tolerant" of gays and lesbians – or even support legalized civil unions or domestic partnerships for same-sex couples – would disapprove of same-sex marriage. Many of my heterosexual informants held firm to the idea that marriage is meant for biological men and women only and coupled those statements with statements meant to show their tolerance for gays and lesbians, even if not their approval. In an interview, one self-identified "devout Christian" who was newly married and in her early thirties highlights what I found to be the case for many heterosexual interview subjects,

> I have no problem with gays – half my friends are gay guys. But it seriously conflicts with my moral and spiritual beliefs as a Christian to say that marriage can be two men or two women. That's just a leap I can't make.

Another heterosexual married male in his late twenties stated,

> I am not going to judge them [gays and lesbians]. That's not my job. That's God's job. But as a Christian I believe [homosexuality] is wrong. It's not the way God intended. I would not support gay marriage at all.

To echo this sentiment, another middle-class heterosexual male informant who is active in his Baptist church, married and employed as a computer programmer said, "I like the [gay] people I know, but I hate what they do…it's not right." These sentiments are repeated in religious and political discourse by Christian conservatives, yet opposition to same-sex marriage doesn't come solely from there.

I have met with gays who oppose or are indifferent to same-sex marriage for a myriad of reasons ranging from they feel it *is* bad for society at large due to the subversions – as one gay male informant in his early fifties put it – of

> traditional family roles and the basic family unit our society was built on. Let them keep that, as long as we can still live together and be protected from hate-crimes. Marriage isn't really that big a deal – we can *still* live together.

This informant is currently "divorced" from his partner and living off of unemployment checks, which he stated will soon run out. Though he heralds the "family unit" he does not want one for himself and characterized himself as "classically fatal" due to his inability to maintain a serious relationship. A lesbian informant in her early thirties who is in a committed relationship with her partner of two years denounced marriage as an institution itself in that

> marriage is just another system of subordination in the first place – I would never get married even if I were straight. Being married doesn't mean anything anyway – it's just a word and a piece of paper – it has no meaning to me and [the informant's partner].

Legal rights and protection for same-sex partnerships still remain an issue which people, regardless of their opinion on same-sex marriage, are often sympathetic to. Many of my informants said they didn't care if their partnership was called marriage or civil unions – as long as they're legal. This notion, however, is one that has divided many in the gay community. At the *Keeping Church and State Separate* panel, one speaker said, "anything separate is inherently unequal." When asked if he would accept the legalization of civil unions or domestic partnerships instead of marriage, the previously mentioned informant who traveled to Canada on his five year anniversary to marry his partner said, "it's a crock. It's being a second-class citizen." He went on to state his

feelings that he was not surprised that the ban on same-sex marriage passed because, as he put it, "this is Georgia. A Bible Belt state and a state in the United States. What did you expect?" In response to being questioned about other gays and lesbians who state they are content with having their unions called civil unions or domestic partnerships rather than marriage as long as the same legal rights were granted heterosexual marriages, he stated,

> it's very shortsighted. It's getting to what's important now while ignoring the long-term, broader perspective of the issue. Yes, it's great to have the legal things now, those aspects now, the property rights, the inheritance rights…you know…those issues – but at what cost? Being substandard or sub-par to heterosexual marriage? I'm an all or nothing kind of person.

Access to Resources

According to anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (2005), identifying oneself as not heterosexual precludes the extension of rights and access to resources. To deny this extension of rights and to quietly accept the inequalities faced by the gay and lesbian community is to succumb to what Herdt calls "state sanctioned discrimination" (2005).

The majority of gays and lesbians I interviewed support and call for legal recognition and the full extension of rights for same-sex partnerships. When asked why they demanded legal recognition of these partnerships, informants repeatedly mentioned issues such as health care, insurance, home ownership, tax benefits, adoption rights and inheritance rights as reasons. I am careful here to use the word 'partnership' rather than 'marriage.' Through interviews with informants, the previously stated fact that the term 'marriage' is one loaded with symbolic power and domination exhibited itself among same-sex couples as well. One informant stated something I found to be echoed by many

other informants who consider themselves in committed same-sex partnerships,

> I don't care what it's called…I don't care what they call it, to be honest, as long as it's legalized. As long as my partner and I can receive the same benefits as a man and a woman in a marriage – I mean, you can call it a civil union – I don't care – I don't care what name you [give it], I mean I truly don't…'marriage' – if you want to say that's between a man and a woman, fine…but just give us your same rights.

Many of my informants stated their concern over legal recognition and the extension of various benefits but made the qualification that, as one lesbian informant in her late thirties said,

> it doesn't have to be called 'marriage.' In the traditional sense, 'marriage' is between a male and a female. It's like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole – you can't compare them. As long as two people love each other, it is not necessary to qualify that with some word.

She continued with, "I think they're [marriage or civil unions] the same thing – no matter how you look at it, there's still the commitment there. [They're] just different words."

One 42 year old woman I interviewed has been with her partner for three years. Together, they raise her two children from her previous marriage with a man. They wear rings on the traditional wedding ring finger which they chose for one another to signify their commitment, and which they exchanged on Valentine's Day. Though she feels same-sex marriage should be legalized, she states, "I don't care to be married in the traditional sense. I don't care what it's called. I want the benefits…the same rights [as heterosexual marriage]." She described the difficulty she and her partner had to face when purchasing a home and then car insurance together. Though they identify themselves as committed, their insurance company does not. They are unable to get car

insurance together for the two cars they have in their household. They are not recognized by their insurance company as married and, thus, only one of them can be on the insurance policy for each car, though the cars are officially owned by both women. Were they legally married, they would both be allowed to be on the insurance policy and could both drive both cars without reservation. They experienced a similar situation with their health insurance provider until, ultimately, they had to find a new provider which did accommodate same-sex couples. Were same-sex marriages legalized, such difficulties would be diminished and laws would be in place to protect same-sex couples who purchase property together to maintain protection and ownership of that property. These laws and protections that are often taken for granted by legally married couples continue to be denied same-sex couples, leaving their access to resources to the discretion of others – in this instance an insurance company.

This is a key to understanding why many gays and lesbians are arguing for same-sex marriage. They are not afforded the same legal recognition and citizenship rights they see heterosexual married couples benefiting from. In interviews, five of my nine homosexual informants wanted same-sex unions to also be called “marriage”, and four of them were willing to give up the battle over terminology as long as their unions were granted the same legal rights as heterosexual marriages. They all wanted equality under the law, even if not equality in terms of language.

Marriage, it appears, as an institutionalized system of classification and identity itself has come to be center-stage in a semiotic and ideological “culture war.” The question of what exactly the problem with same-sex marriage is, has been the primary

focus of my research. Same-sex marriage is not only about access to economic resources; many companies offer domestic-partner benefits anyway. Nor is it about healthcare – countries such as Canada offer universal healthcare to its citizens, yet the debate over same-sex marriage was intense there as well. I argue it is about access to marriage as a resource unto itself. "Marriage" is a word loaded with legitimacy and authority, and is a resource systematically denied gays and lesbians. This inequality has led to the re-fortification of the gay and lesbian community as well as a political movement with which to identify. Thus, identity has become politics and politics has become identity.

What's most interesting is that even though legal marriage continues to be denied gays and lesbians, many I interviewed seem either un-phased by or uninterested in this denial. Many adhere to the heteronormative notion that marriage is for unions of biological men and biological women and that as long as the legality of their union was equal to heterosexual unions, the terminology used to name their union is unimportant. They want the equality of legal recognition. Hence, for many of my informants this issue is fundamentally about legal rights. However, the approach taken by those campaigning and lobbying for gay rights was to demand marriage; voicing their position as being one of refusal to settle for anything less that fully, non-segregated marriage equality. They call for what Jack Senterfitt, attorney at the Southeastern Regional Office of Lambda Legal, described in a speech as "not a new institution called same-sex marriage, [but] the equality under civil law of marriage, period."

‘We’re Married!’ vs. ‘We’re Civil Unionized!’
Separate But (Not) Equal

Gay and lesbian activists seemingly recognize their station as counter publics (Warner 2002), and have attempted to highlight similarities between their movement and the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement has now come to be viewed as a valorized movement of counter publics which can now be heralded as “successful.” This success lies in the fact that the movement resulted in the political public sphere in the granting of equal rights for blacks. To draw parallels to the Civil Rights Movement, gay and lesbian activists consciously chose to model their own struggle over the access to “marriage equality” and do so by painting themselves as the "new" movement to be valorized.

In her *New York Times* article, Tamar Lewin argued that gay marriage “has emerged as the central issue of the gay movement less because of its being at the top of any gay agenda than because of the thunderous reaction it has produced” (Lewin 2004). According to Lewin, the issue of gay marriage shows maturation in the gay rights movement. No longer are gays simply seeking the permission to openly display their sexual orientation without discrimination (referred to in the article as “liberation”), but now the movement wishes to promote the sameness of same-sex couples with their heterosexual counterparts. Descriptions of gay couples in popular media today often stress that gays pay taxes, worry about health insurance, fall in love and raise children, just like heterosexual couples (Lewin 2004).

Recently, a nationwide marketing campaign also promoting the same-ness of homosexuals has begun with billboards and print advertisements showing photos of

people alongside various phrases such as “I’m your child’s teacher. And, I’m gay.” These billboards and advertisements, designed and funded by the Human Rights Campaign, are also present in Atlanta and the message is clear: Gay people are all around – they interact with heterosexuals and are visually indistinguishable from their heterosexual counterparts. Gays are the same. Thus, gays should be equal under the law.

This message and its corresponding advertising campaign have sparked controversy among religious fundamentalists who have viewed the ad campaign as threatening and hostile. Response has indicated many find these ads to be shocking because they attempt to not only claim ownership over same-ness but that gays could very well be the people next door. One informant stated, “those ads are just scary. I mean, I know there are gay people, but do they have to throw it in my face? I don’t run around screaming ‘I’m heterosexual - look at me.’”

Jonathan Rauch, a writer in residence at The Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., recently published a book entitled *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America.* At his book signing at OutWrite Bookstore in Midtown Atlanta, he spoke on the issue of same-sex marriage and read several excerpts from his book including the following:

> When two people approach the altar or the bench to marry, they approach not only the presiding official but all of society. They enter into a compact not just with each other but with the world, and that compact says: 'We, the two of us, pledge to make a home together, care for one another, and, perhaps, raise children together. In exchange for the caregiving commitment we are making, you, our community, will recognize us not only as individuals but as a bonded pair, a *family*, granting us a special autonomy and a special status which only marriage conveys. (Rauch 2004:33)

It must be noted that OutWrite Bookstore is a bookstore which caters to the gay and lesbian community within an area with a large gay and lesbian population. No voices of opposition to same-sex marriage were present, therefore the discussion focused on differentiating views on how to go about initiating reform, the degree of reform acceptable and how much compromise could be realistically expected. What followed the book reading was a rather lengthy discussion on same-sex marriage and how to promote it in Georgia in order to defeat SR 595 in the November referendum. Rauch stated his belief that, "we must define marriage by what it obliges" and that gay and lesbian marriages would "reinforce the institution itself." This stance reiterates what Evelyn Blackwood critiques in that as gays and lesbians seek to gain marriage rights, they perpetuate the institution of marriage itself. Blackwood's critique lies in that as marriage continues to be administered by the state, it will continue to be exclusionary of non-coupled people, whether they be single or polygamous (2005). Rauch wants marriage for gays to reinforce the institution. This institution of marriage being one which Blackwood sees as perpetuating normative models and exclusionary tactics. Perhaps, the institution and administering of that institution are what is fundamentally flawed and requires attention.

Extremist groups, such as those present at the aforementioned protest rallies expressing opposition views, often state opinions which portray gays and lesbians as fundamentally unable to recognize "proper" or "moral" behavior in any aspect of their lives. These extremist groups counter Rauch's notion that gay marriage would fortify the institution of marriage and refuse same-sex couples the status Rauch describes. In fact,

homosexuals as an entirety are often perceived and portrayed by opposition leaders as degenerate, thereby attempting to further marginalize, dehumanize and attack the credibility and legitimacy of gays and lesbians altogether. For example:

> Forsaking all others is an essential component of marriage. Obviously it is not always honored in practice. But it is the ideal to which we rightly aspire, and in most marriages the ideal is in fact the norm. Many advocates of same-sex marriage simply do not share this ideal; promiscuity among homosexual males is well known. (Bennett 1996:275)

In this passage, the author implies homosexual males are incapable of the moral maturity of participating in a committed, long-term monogamist relationship – thereby completely discounting not only the legitimacy but also the very existence of those who can and do.

What I have found through the interview process is that many people who oppose same-sex marriage are not opposed to legal recognition of civil unions and domestic partnerships so that same-sex couples can enjoy all the legal and economic benefits heterosexual couples enjoy. Additionally, many heterosexual people I have interviewed who oppose same-sex marriage seem to want to make it clear they are tolerant of gays and lesbians. Furthermore, none of my informants identify with the extremist attitudes and statements made by the religious group at the October 2004 protest rallies. What emerges as the primary issue opponents of same-sex marriage feel uncomfortable with is the extension of the term “marriage” to these unions.

The gay and lesbian community has changed its approach in representing itself in an attempt to de-emphasize sexuality and place the spotlight firmly on the community identity itself. The issue of same-sex marriage has emerged as a defining political

argument shaping the manner by which the gay movement today positions itself. In Georgia alone, gay-rights advocacy groups the Human Rights Campaign, Georgia Equality, Georgians Against Discrimination, Lambda Legal, the Victory Fund and GayMarriageNow! all established campaigns which were designed to rally their supporters to make their voices heard leading up to the November 2004 elections. This was done through various town-hall meetings, protest rallies and editorial articles published in local media outlets. Additionally, several Internet mailing lists have been established which serve to communicate to their subscribers not only when and where activities and fundraisers are to be held, but also important developments in the continuing legal fight to have the amendment ruled unconstitutional.

In the various protests and talks I attended during my research, the primary points of discussion were to emphasize the same-ness of homosexual couples with their heterosexual counterparts. Opponents of same-sex marriage, according to my findings, can be seen in two major categories. First, there are those who oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds and couple this opposition with notions of homosexuality as being morally deviant and “unnatural” – and thus demonstrating their view of gay and lesbian identity as being unable to be separated from sexuality. Additionally, there are those who favor civil unions or other legal protections for same-sex couples, but oppose the extension of the definition of "marriage" to include same-sex couples. This stance indicates that

> even though the term 'marriage' still remains a sticking point for many people, the new idea of civil unions is becoming more acceptable. This is a transition stage, because it still is not totally equal. It is separate and unequal, just like decisions trying to provide for some rights of black people in the segregated South before

> the United States Supreme Court ruled firmly in 1956 that separate is inherently unequal. That time will come in the area of gay and lesbian rights. (Williams and Retter 2003:258)

In response to this attitude, one lesbian informant replied that, "they [people who oppose same-sex marriage but agree with legalized civil unions] are still trying to separate us [gays] from them."

Chapter V

Conclusion

The manipulation and use of the symbolic meanings of marriage and religion have been the primary method used by both groups in this argument in attempts to valorize themselves. The strategies employed by both supporting and opposing groups of same-sex marriage which included editorializing the issue in the media, lobbying politicians, and protesting the amendment were geared not only to identify the issue itself, but also as a movement creating a public and politicized identity for gays and lesbians to appropriate. The issue of same-sex marriage was not simply something to fight for, but it has become a means by which gay and lesbian community leaders supporting same-sex marriage wish to create a politicized identity to gain access to the strategic resources associated with legal marriage. They want recognition.

> 'Recognition' in this context becomes a code word for the idea that gender and ethnicity matter, that these are not differences to be subsumed away in a seemingly gender-neutral or race-neutral discourse of social justice. Groups marked out by these characteristics need to be recognized as political actors in their own right – recognized, to that extent, as a distinct and different group – for without this recognition, they will have limited influence of the formation of public policy…this is more often a claim about political voice than the moral worth of the groups in question. (Hobson 2003:265)

I have found through the interview process that there are many people who oppose same-sex marriage but are not opposed to civil unions and domestic partnerships so that same-sex couples can enjoy all the legal and economic benefits heterosexual couples enjoy – such as inheritance rights, health care and life insurance benefits, etc. Additionally, heterosexuals I have interviewed who oppose same-sex marriage seem to want to make it clear that they are tolerant of gays and lesbians. Furthermore, my

informants did not identify with the extremist attitudes and statements made by the religious groups I observed at the two protest rallies. What I found to be the primary issue opponents of same-sex marriage feel uncomfortable with is the extension of the term "marriage" to these unions.

Opposition to same-sex marriage in Georgia was made clear by the voting majority, as was the case in ten other states with similar constitutional amendments on the ballot. The large number of people voting against same-sex marriage demonstrated not only the failure of the movement to reach and effectively persuade voters, but a serious distinction in need of clarification of what is at stake. That is how exactly should marriage be defined. Exit polls indicated that 76% of Georgia voters voted on issues of morality. According to the website for *The Washington Post*, 3,138,369 people voted on the proposed state constitutional amendment defining marriage as being only between a biological man and a biological woman. Only 749,025 voted against this amendment, showing a clear majority against same-sex marriage in Georgia. While many people I have interviewed regarding same-sex marriage are not opposed to civil unions and the granting of partnership benefits to same-sex couples, many simply do not wish the term "marriage" to be applied to anything other than the "traditional" model – viewing that as "moral." Surprisingly, my ethnographic findings seem to indicate many same-sex couples simply long for legal protection of their unions and are not overwhelmingly concerned with being identified as "married." Thus, it can be determined that there is much variation within the gay and lesbian community as some demand full marriage rights and the term "marriage" being applied to their unions while some call for legal

protection without concern over terminology and others have no apparent interest in marriage at all, viewing it as a system of patriarchal domination.

Re-Constructing Marriage

Political scientist and queer theorist Mark Hertzog (1996) has determined that "object appraisal" – the method employed to identify an object – has been utilized by opponents to same-sex marriage in their attempts to claim marriage as their own, assign it a meaning which can not be extended to same-sex couples and grant it more symbolic power than it currently holds. In these terms a political affiliation, and who stands for or against the object (in relation to those in power and those seeking power), will determine how people stand in terms of the debate over same-sex marriage – with marriage itself as the object being appraised. Marriage, then, is being used to further subordinate the gay and lesbian community, confirm the already present symbolic domination over, and marginalization of, same-sex couples, and is being treated as an object which defines who is and who isn't in power (Hertzog 1996). Marriage is a social and cultural construct. However, as indicated by my ethnographic research, it is a construct that, for many people in American society, carries significant weight. When marriage is denied same-sex couples, this weight manifests itself as a symbol of inequality and subordination.

Gay and lesbian identities, in their struggle to be granted access to the legal resources afforded heterosexuals, have politicized themselves and simultaneously packaged what *the* gay movement is supposed to represent as a commodity marketed to not only their opposition, but their "constituents" as well. To use the issue of same-sex marriage as a rallying point, the leaders of the Atlanta gay and lesbian community have

not only attempted to define themselves in the terms of this political struggle, but to further the creation of a community identity of solidarity in the public sphere based on this political discourse.

Gay and lesbian legitimacy in this sphere was denied by opposition groups at the protest rallies described who made their case against the gay and lesbian groups based on heteronormative discourses. They cited the sexual practice of homosexuals as a deviant and unnatural identity, and hence, one which should not be granted the same recognition and access to resources as heterosexual, or "normal" people. Essentially, the opposition was there to challenge not the protesters' demands for the legalization of same-sex marriage, but their very right to exist as a sexed identity in the first place; particularly as an identity vying for a position and a voice in the public sphere.

The gay and lesbian community – a community based on an identity which is tolerated in our society, but which remains strategically marginalized – has attempted to achieve political status through protests and other public displays of community in order for its demands to be heard. Particularly when arguing for the extension of rights, any public relies on spectacles in order to showcase their identity and demand access to the political public sphere. Protesters at the two rallies described engaged in performances meant to draw attention to their identity, demand validation of their identity through the attention, and demand access to legally recognized marriage.

Kinship and, to use Kath Weston's (1991) term, "families we choose" is as much about affinity groups and shared ideologies and identity as it is about biological kinship. The argument over same-sex marriage, however, is not one of kinship. Gays and lesbians

have created their own kinship systems outside conventional definitions and instances of same-sex commitment ceremonies without legal recognition continue to exist. The argument, though, *is* about legal recognition and protection of a certain manifestation of those kinships.

Identities based on affinity groups – such as gays and lesbians – who share similar ideologies, emerge as not only groups of affinity, but also groups which recognize their subordination by the dominant core, and act in agency in order to gain not assimilation, but recognition. The gay and lesbian community recognizes they are being denied citizenship rights based on a public sexual identity – by being denied legalized marriage – and are making choices about how to adapt to this inequality. This has manifested in the demand for legal marriage for same-sex couples which has simultaneously reconstituted a community identity based firmly in the political. When access to a resource – legal marriage – is systematically denied a group of people – gays and lesbians – political movements often come to fruition. As Lewin observes, "same-sex commitments are nothing new; only the demand for equity and recognition have changed the landscape" (Lewin 1998:25). This demand for recognition, however, is in actuality a demand for assimilation. Gays and lesbians want the same-ness of heterosexual marriage and seek access to an institutionalized ideology wherein the state not only defines marriage through its recognition, but through its denial as well. The call for recognition of same-sex marriage emerges as simultaneously a request for assimilation – though the request itself is viewed by opponents as wholly radical. This move toward assimilation and the push for not just equality, but the notion that gays and lesbians are

the same as their heterosexual counterparts equates the movement with defiance, but also with compliance to dominant institutions and ideologies.

My informants all indicated the desire for the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples so that their unions would be legally and publicly recognized. They sought for those laws and benefits to be administered by the state to ensure equality under the law. Though there were different opinions on whether or not same-sex couples should have their unions called marriage or civil unions or domestic partnerships, each of my homosexual informants made clear statements about their desire for legal recognition of their unions and to have their unions be treated equally as heterosexual marriages.

This presupposes state recognition to be the institution that is the only way by which a same-sex couple gains legitimacy to their union and thereby receive the same legal rights. Judith Butler notes that, as the queer community seeks legitimization from the state, they simultaneously give the state the power to grant or withhold that power (2004). Furthermore, as gay rights activists seek legitimization under the same recognizable and normative practices as heterosexuals – in this case marriage – new dilemmas arise. Both Butler and Michael Warner (2002b) rhetorically ask whether these activists calling for legalized same-sex marriage are contributing to making any sexual life or practice that exists outside the norms of monogamy or standard two person marriage illegitimate? Gay marriage directly questions what forms of relationships are legitimated and granted status by the state. The demand for gay marriage shows a desire for sexual orientation to not only be made public and displayed freely by non-

heterosexuals, but a legitimation of those public sexualities by the state – which should be distributing such legitimation in a nondiscriminatory manner. To ask for legitimacy from the state is to ask for legitimacy in the only ways it is afforded by the state – in this case a normalizing institution of marriage (Butler 2004). This leaves the gay movement and homosexuals seeking recognition of same-sex unions to find that their "public and recognizable sense of personhood is fundamentally dependent upon the lexicon of that legitimation" (Butler 2004:105). I argue that the battle over the lexicon of marriage and of the family itself has fortified those symbolically loaded terms as having positions of dominance. Through the struggle for the appropriation of those terms and the legalized recognition of gay and lesbian access to and use of those terms, supporters of same-sex marriage have granted those who claim those terms as their own the authority to legitimate who can and who can not use them. This has materialized not only in the realm of legal rights and recognition, but also the difference between what relationships are tolerated versus which ones are truly legitimated and therefore granted status, access to resources and recognition. As a panelist stated at the *Keeping Church and State Separate* forum, the conservative campaign of "preserving the traditional institution of marriage is simply a nicer way of stating the state's moral disapproval of same-sex couples."

I Now Pronounce…Final Thoughts

The gay rights movement has made strides and concerted conscious effort to move the focus of public opinion about the gay community away from issues of sexual practice; to create an identity which is seen as "legitimate" and worthy of recognition as

an identity constituted by a myriad of factors – one of which is sexual orientation. However, this effort has seemingly fallen on many deaf ears in that many opposition groups do not oppose same-sex marriage or gay rights on their own, but homosexuality itself.

My intention when I began this research was to engage in a project which could then be used to inform policy decisions and the campaign for same-sex marriage at Georgia Equality. Essentially, I wanted to produce a praxis project. Praxis, according to Van Willigen, "is thinking about and acting upon the world around us. It is the process by which the cultural world is created and the physical world is transformed" (Van Willigen 2002:95). This type of advocacy research – targeted at addressing imbalances, or perceived imbalances, in the "allocation of power, economic resources, social status, material goods, and other desired social or economic elements in a community, society, or globally" (Trotter & Schensul 1998) – is precisely the type of anthropology I find demanding, necessary, important and, thus, engaging and stimulating. The issue of same-sex marriage is defined by imbalances of power and equality in the recognition of same-sex unions as legal marriages in relation to their heterosexual counterparts. Heterosexual married couples are able to not only benefit from mutual health care, and the other benefits awarded married couples, but their status as married is not questioned – it is "valid" and "real." For same-sex couples, one partner is denied access or authority by the majority of legal, medical and financial institutions from which the other partner receives services.

When I began this project and started to “get out there” to conduct my research in the field, I did not expect to find gays and lesbians who did not agree that marriage should be a word extended to describe their unions. I expected to find unanimous support among the gay and lesbian community for the extension of not only legal recognition and protection to same-sex unions, but that those unions should also be called marriage. The push from those opposed to same-sex marriage emerged and I saw gay rights advocates begin responding. Same-sex marriage was being denied – and, that is a denial which I firmly believe to be social, symbolic and political inequality.

As a researcher, I projected my personal beliefs and those of the people I initially worked with and spoke to in both academic and casual settings onto the entirety of the queer community. What I found, however, is that for many of my informants, they simply cared more about the “real” results of the debate and whether or not their own relationships would be affected. They wanted these “real” results to manifest themselves in that their partnerships would be secured through legal protections and that they would not have to confront the hassles of separate insurance policies, problems with healthcare administration or property inheritance. I have interviewed gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples as well as single individuals regarding definitions of the term marriage. I have met with both supporters of same-sex marriage and opponents to same-sex marriage and, I feel it important to note, they have not always been of the sexual orientation one would expect. Five of my nine gay informants stated they didn’t care whether their union was officially called a marriage or not, so long as they shared the same benefits as heterosexual marriages. Many of them did not object to the idea that marriage was a

traditional institution and had no problems if it were to remain being only applied to heterosexual couples. They stated they did not care what terminology was used to describe their union, but that they wholeheartedly desired to have the same legal benefits afforded heterosexual couples.

This thesis has not only proven an enlightening academic and ethnographic experience for me, but a sharp realization that I, too, am guilty of subscribing to normalizing notions of marriage and equality. As I found, many informants seemed content with legal recognition and were willing to ignore the issue of terminology. Additionally, I – almost in iconic reverence – subscribed to the mantra "equal rights for all", and to the belief that marriage was inherently a good thing. Though a nice idea, this is not a reality, and to pre-suppose that the state is the body which officiates and presides over equality is to allow the state to dictate not only what equality is, but how it is practiced.

Limitations in this research are not absent. The data set examined for this thesis is not large enough to significantly influence policy reform or have any major impact in terms of altering campaigns for same-sex marriage or its opponents. This thesis, however, uses data to highlight what has emerged as the fundamental arguments in support of and in opposition to same-sex marriage. This baseline data scratches the proverbial surface in examining the complexities of this argument, but it was my intention in this thesis to highlight the arguments and describe the ideologies which fuel them through literature review, theoretical and ethnographic interpretations of data collected. Future research built upon this thesis would require a larger informant pool of

both heterosexual and homosexual supporters and opponents to same-sex marriage as well as a more thorough analysis of those homosexual informants involved in same-sex unions who are unconcerned with their unions being called marriage, but desire legal recognition. Additionally, my informant pool itself was not diverse in terms of socio-economic class, marital status and race. Ideologies of "the family" and of marriage differ based on a multitude of variables – all of which could not be addressed in the context of this thesis.

This thesis, through an analysis of the various discourses in the public sphere, ethnographic research in a variety of settings coupled with theoretical interpretations of these ethnographic findings, has demonstrated the debate over same-sex marriage to be one of extreme complexity based in religion, politics, capitalist structures, vocabulary, denial of legitimation of a group based on sexual orientation and ultimately denial of that group's legal rights.

Occurrences such my being asked to wear the pink triangle and my being questioned about my sexual orientation had proven to me the politicized nature of not only the issue of same-sex marriage, but of gay and lesbian identity itself. Fundamentally, this thesis has illustrated the manners by which that identity is politically construed and simultaneously how politics has become an identity. Each group in the debate over same-sex marriage – whether they be gay or straight, married or single, for or against same-sex marriage – is incapable of separating their politics from their identity; any attempt to do so would leave them both wholly unrecognizable.

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